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ABSTRACT

A study examined (1) the decision-making processes used by Korean learners of English as a second language (ESL) to make requests in different situations, and (2) how the learners describe those processes. Subjects were 30 Korean students, 15 males and 15 females, enrolled in an intensive English program at a midwestern university in the United States. A written discourse completion test and immediate retrospection were used to elicit requests and, subsequently, thoughts about the decision-making process. The test included 12 situations varying in the familiarity and relative social power of the interlocutors. Analysis of student responses revealed six categories characterizing the learners' decision-making processes during request-making: assessment of the situation; monitoring for appropriate sociolinguistic expressions; use of request skills; connection to personal life; cross-cultural comparison; and monitoring for language forms. Results suggest that the learners' interlanguage system was engaged in cognitively varied, complex processes in realizing requests, and that immediate retrospection as a data collection method produced rich information about what the learners had been thinking. The discourse-completion test situations are appended. (Contains 27 references.) (MSE)

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"ESL Korean learners' decision-making processes in the performance of the speech act of requests"

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Abstract

This paper investigated the ESL Korean learners' decision-making processes involved in the realization of the speech act of requests with the use of immediate retrospection as a data-gathering method. In a study conducted with thirty upper-intermediate and advanced Korean learners of ESL, each learner was asked to complete a discourse completion test (DCT), and immediately after the completion of it, to retrospect about what he/she had been doing and thinking when performing requests in a given situation. Retrospective verbal data were content-analyzed, and six different categories were developed: assessment of situation, monitoring for appropriate sociolinguistic expressions, use of requestive skills, connection to personal life, cross-cultural comparison, and monitoring for language forms. The findings of the study suggested that the learners were engaged in a variety of mental activities and underwent various, complex cognitive processes occurring in request realizations.

1. Introduction

Interlanguage pragmatics is the area of studying L2 learners' pragmatic knowledge (particularly speech acts). It is interdisciplinary in that it belongs to both second language acquisition and pragmatics (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993). The research in interlanguage pragmatics over the last decade has tended to center on one major question: to what extent and in what ways do language learners differ from target language speakers in performing speech acts? In finding the answer to this question, most studies based their descriptions of L2 learners' pragmatic knowledge mainly on an analysis of performance or production data. That is, data were collected by either elicitation (e.g., DCTs and role plays), or ethnographic observations. Resulting data are semantic formulas or strategies for a particular speech act, which represent an end product and do not reveal what learners have been thinking and doing when realizing a speech act. As a result, very little is known about learners' decision-making processes occurring in speech act realizations while rich information is available about realization patterns of various speech acts by native and non-native speakers of a target language.

In recent years, some researchers in interlanguage pragmatics have expressed the need to investigate L2 learners' decision-making processes involved in speech act performance. As Cohen & Olshtain (1993) pointed out, "What is still lacking are detailed descriptions of the processes involved in the production of these speech act utterances by nonnative speakers" (p. 34). Likewise, Cohen (1996a, 1996b) suggested that we still need to better understand how and on what basis L2 learners make sociocultural choices and select sociolinguistic forms in order to perform a given speech act in a particular situation. Therefore, to get a whole picture of L2 learners' speech act behaviors, it is indispensible to look into their internal, cognitive processes occurring in the performance of speech acts, not to mention strategies realizing them.

The literature on interlanguage pragmatics shows a very limited number of studies that investigated learners' decision-making processes involved in speech act productions. Cohen & Olshtain (1993) were among the first to examine those processes by looking at how non-native speakers of English assess, plan and perform speech acts such as requests, apologies and complaints. In a study involving advanced Hebrew learners of EFL, they were given six situations calling for those acts and instructed to participate in role-plays with a native English-speaking interlocutor. After the role-plays, they were also asked a series of questions regarding the factors affecting the production of utterances. Non-native speakers were shown to make a general assessment of their responses without planing specific vocabulary and grammatical structures in responses, and engage in the processes such as self-debate before selecting language forms, monitor use, lexical avoidance and abandoning of words or expressions. Robinson (1991) was interested not only in learners' cognitive processes occurring in speech act performance but also in the use of introspection as a data-gathering method. In a study conducted with ESL Japanese learners (intermediate and advanced), they completed a DCT including six situations calling for refusals, and

verbally reported everything that had happened during responding to the DCT. Immediately after the DCT, subjects were also interviewed with regard to the content of their responses from a think-aloud session. Most important, introspective methods were found to provide rich, specific information about the cognitive processing that occurred during the performance of refusals.

From Cohen & Olshtain's (1993) and Robinson's (1991) studies, it can be reasonably assumed that verbal reporting (i.e., introspection: concurrent and retrospective verbalizations) is a useful research tool to provide information about the processes learners undergo in speech act realizations. In fact, an examination of language processing in many areas of L2 (e.g., reading, writing and learning strategies) has been done through introspection. The use of introspection as a data collection method is based on the belief that verbal reports allow learners to reconstruct the interlanguage system or the sequence of thoughts occurring during a given task, and thus, help to look into their cognitive processes involved in language learning and use. Though, unlike other areas in L2, little attempt have been made to systematically use introspection as a research tool in interlanguage pragmatics, researchers such as Cohen (1996c) advocate the use of introspection as a data-gathering method, maintaining that verbal report is a valuable source of information on mental state, and provides a way to "the reasoning processes underlying cognition, response and decision making" (p. 8). Likewise, Cohen & Olshtain (1994) argued that "only through verbal report are researchers able to tap some of these cognitive processes by calling the learners' attention to them" (p. 149).

In light of the fact that little information is available about L2 learners' processes involved in speech act production, and that a legitimate way to examine these processes is the use of verbal reports, the present paper investigated the ESL Korean learners' processes occurring in the realization of the speech act of requests with the use of immediate retrospection as a data-gathering method. It focused on describing the ways Korean learners undergo cognitive processes involved in the performance of requests. The paper attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are ESL Korean learners' decision-making processes involved in the realization of requests in different situations?
2. How do ESL Korean learners describe or explain what they were thinking and doing when realizing requests in various situations?

To find the answers to the above questions, a study was conducted in which an individual Korean learner of ESL was asked to read the description of each situation in a DCT and write down what they would be most likely to say in a given situation. Immediately after the completion of the DCT, the learner was instructed to retrospect about what s/he had been doing and thinking when realizing a request in each one of the situations of the DCT.

The main reason for selecting the speech act of requests lies in the fact that

they are frequently used in everyday communication for gaining information, help, or cooperation from others in general, and are extremely important to L2 learners in particular in the sense that the majority of their interaction with target language speakers takes place in the form of requests (Fraser, 1978; Koike, 1989). In addition, Korean differs significantly from English both linguistically and culturally. It has a complex and sophisticated system of honorifics to mark deference as well as an independent linguistic system to encode politeness (Hwang, 1990), as compared to English which uses directness levels, modals, moods and downgraders (mitigators) to express politeness in request realizations. Also there are differences in cultural norms involved in social structure, which may affect sociocultural perceptions of contextual factors in the performance of requests: Korea has been a "vertical and hierarchical society with great emphasis placed on power" (Shinn, 1990, p. 13) whereas American society is horizontal and highly values individual autonomy and privacy. In light of these linguistic and cultural differences between the two languages, it would be interesting to examine how and on what basis ESL Korean learners realize requests and select level of politeness in various situations.

2. Methods

1) Subjects

Thirty Korean learners (15 males and 15 females) learning English as a second language (ESL) participated in the study. They were enrolled in the Intensive English Program (IEP) at a major university in the midwestern region of the US. The English program aims to help non-native speakers to improve English language skills needed for achieving their academic or vocational goals (CELT, 1994). It has seven proficiency levels, and all of the subjects were in the five, six and seven levels of the program (i.e., upper-intermediate and advanced level). They ranged in age from 20 to 29 years. They had been undergraduate or graduate students in their home country and had been studying English for more than 7 years. All of the learners had never been to English speaking countries before coming to the US. An average length of residence in the US was 4.3 months. An informal interview with the individual learners conducted before data collection showed that nearly all of them had been familiar with the term 'pragmatics' and known about the importance of developing pragmatic knowledge in language learning since they had been introduced into 'pragmatics' in their IEP classes in which they had had many opportunities to perform various speech acts through completing discourse completion tests.

2) Instruments and Procedures

In gathering the data, two different methods were used: a discourse completion test (DCT) and immediate retrospection. The DCT was an open-ended, written questionnaire and was used to elicit the speech act of requests. The main reason for choosing the DCT lies in Eisenstein & Bodman's (1986) argument that DCTs provide

subjects (particularly non-native speakers) with a good opportunity to respond well. According to them, non-native speakers tend to feel nervous and uncomfortable during a face-to-face conversation or oral exam in which they feel pressure, and as a result, they may not be able to show their linguistic and pragmatic knowledge fully in such situations. However, in written questionnaires like DCTs, they are provided with sufficient time to plan and make their best response to a given situation. So if they are not able to use knowledge about speech acts in unpressured situations such as DCTs, they are not likely to perform better or more effectively in face-to-face interactions. Therefore, the DCT was thought to be an appropriate measure of their best knowledge. In addition, even though informants' responses to DCTs do not adequately reflect actual speech behaviors and represent interactive features (e.g., tone, prosodic, depth of emotion, repetition and negotiation) occurring in natural conversation, it has been shown that DCTs allow researchers to look into stereotypical semantic formulas and strategies for a given speech act that seem to appear in natural speech (Beebe & Cummings, 1996; Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989; Beebe & Takahashi, 1989).

The DCT included twelve situations developed on the basis of a combination of two situational variables, i.e., familiarity and social power. Familiarity has two values, + and −: + familiarity means that interlocutors have known each other, and − familiarity indicates that they do not know each other. Social power has three values, +, 0 and −: + social power means a situation where the speaker has more social power than the hearer (speaker dominance), and − social power refers to a situation where the hearer has more power than the speaker (hearer dominance). 0 social power represents a situation where the speaker and hearer are equal in social power. A systematic combination of two values of familiarity with three values of social power yielded six categories: (+ familiarity, + social power), (+ familiarity, 0 social power), (+ familiarity, − social power), (− familiarity, + social power), (− familiarity, 0 social power) and (− familiarity, − social power). Each category contained two different situations, which resulted in twelve situations. Role relationships between a speaker and a hearer in terms of familiarity and social power in twelve situations are attached to the Appendix A.

Regarding content of situations, an effort was made to develop scenarios which the subjects of the study (i.e., the student population) were familiar with, and which they might have reacted to before. As the main reason, if they are not familiar with scenarios, they may be forced to produce unnatural speech act behavior, which affects the overall results of the study (Cohen & Olshtain, 1994). However, one limitation is that since the scenarios are most likely to occur in a college or university setting, they cannot represent a variety of settings that take place in everyday life. Among the twelve scenarios, two were taken from Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper (1989) and five from Mir-Fernandez (1994) though some revisions were made to the originals to create more specific context.

To refine the DCT, a pilot study was conducted in which the DCT was administered to three Korean learners of ESL and three native speakers of English. On

the basis of suggestions and comments by both groups, the DCT was modified. As an example, one of the twelve situations in the DCT is given below, and the rest are attached to the Appendix B.

Situation 5)

As a part-time job, you are working as a library monitor. While checking on each floor in the library, you see a group of students that you don't know talking loudly in a non-discussion area. It seems clear that this loud noise disturbs other students' studying. You want those students to be quiet or move to a discussion area. You approach them. What would you say?

Throughout DCT and retrospection sessions, the researcher met with subjects one at a time. In the DCT, an individual subject was asked to read the description of each situation and write down what s/he would be most likely to say in a given situation. The subjects were informed that they could spend as much time as they wanted. It took average twenty five minutes each subject to complete all the twelve situations in the DCT. Immediately after the completion of the whole DCT, each subject was instructed to retrospect about what s/he had been doing and thinking when realizing a request in each one of the twelve situation. That is, each subject was asked to recall and tell what s/he had thought one situation after another. The subjects' retrospection was audio-taped. The reason why the subjects were not instructed to retrospect after the completion of each item of the DCT was that the retrospection about a previous item might influence the way they make their response to a following item.

Since there was a time interval between the completion of the DCT and the verbalization, it was felt that the subjects might have had difficulty recalling what they had thought and done during the DCT. So to stimulate accurate recall, they were asked to take a look at their responses to each item in the DCT. Also since there were some subjects who did not say anything immediately, they were asked a few questions as a prompt such as "What did you think when you made this request strategy?" "On what basis did you use politeness in this situation?", and "What was the most important factor influencing the performance of a request in this situation?" Retrospective verbalizations were conducted in subjects' native language unless they claimed that they would feel more comfortable using English. It was assumed that retrospective verbal data would describe the ways the subjects undergo cognitive processes involved in request realizations as they recall them.

The use of immediate retrospective verbalization was based on Ericsson & Simon's (1993) suggestion that immediately after the completion of a task, retrieval cues still remains in short-term memory, and an informant is able to accurately recall the sequence of his/her thoughts occurring during task performance. Another reason was that retrospection provides richer and more insightful information about learners' decision-making processes than does concurrent verbalization because the former allows

learners to edit or analyze what they were doing and thinking while the latter usually does not (Cohen, 1996c).

3) Data analysis

Since all subjects used their native language in verbal reporting, audiotaped data were transcribed in Korean, and during the transcription pause fillers (e.g., ah, er, uhm, etc) and repetition of words and phrases were removed for the sake of simplicity of coding. Then a Korean version of transcript was translated into English. Two versions (i.e., Korean and English) of transcripts were compared with each other by an assistant researcher to see if there was any difference and to establish cross-cultural equivalence between the two versions. Also since verbalizations were done anonymously, it was impossible to give back either the Korean or English version of transcriptions to the subjects in order to make sure that what they had said during retrospection was all included in transcriptions. Instead, the assistant researcher compared the original protocols with the English version of transcript.

An analysis of verbal data was done on the basis of content analysis suggested by Merriam (1988) and Strauss & Corbin (1990) with the following procedures taken. First, the transcriptions were unitized in such a way that each sentence in the transcriptions was read carefully several times with a focus on its content in order to identify units of information which were relevant to the research question and could stand by themselves. Second, each unit of information, which was usually the same as an individual sentence, was put on a strip of paper. Third, to develop categories, units of information which represented similar concepts were grouped together through comparing one unit of information with the next one. So from the pile of units (i.e., strips of paper), the first strip of paper was selected, read, and placed to one side.

Then, the second strip of paper was selected and read to determine whether its content was similar to that of the first strip of paper. If so, it was put with the first. However, if not, it was placed in a different place. Fourth, each new strip of paper was read and compared to previous ones to determine whether it was similar to one of the previous strips of paper, or whether it was different, which would represent a new category. In this way, all strips of paper were read and compared to one another. In the end, a set of categories emerged. These categories were reviewed to see what they were and to determine whether they overlapped or were related to one another. After categories emerged, the researcher asked the assistant researcher to develop categories by herself, and the resulting categories were compared to those of the researcher to see if there were differences between them. As a whole, there was a high degree of consistency between the two researchers. Finally, each category was given a name which best represented the phenomenon of a given category.

3. Results and Discussions

As mentioned above, transcriptions were unitized, and in all, 357 units of information were identified. Each unit of information, which was put on a strip of paper, was compared with another to develop categories. Six different categories emerged which characterized the learners' decision making processes occurring during request realizations. The six categories include: assessment of situation; monitoring for appropriate sociolinguistic expressions, use of requestive skills, connection to personal life, cross-cultural comparison, and monitoring for language forms. Table 1 shows the definition and an example for each category. The order in which six categories are presented in Table 1 does not mean that they occurred in a sequential or linear fashion.

Table 1. Categories developed from the analysis of verbal data

Categories	Definition	Example
Assessment of situation	Learners analyze situational factors such as familiarity and social power with relation to the addressee and use their own judgments of the factors as a primary source of information in request realizations.	"When I knew the addressee, or when I had more power than him/her, I tended to make requests directly without hesitation. But if the addressee was a professor, who had more power than I, I planned what I should say in advance in my requests".
Monitoring for appropriate sociolinguistic expressions	Learners state difficulty in selecting appropriate expressions, question the appropriateness of certain forms they chose, debate between two expressions, and express anxiety over the appropriateness of expressions.	"I couldn't remember polite expressions that I really wanted to use".
Use of requestive skills	Learners report the request skills or techniques they employed: providing the reasons for making the request, arousing the interlocutor sympathy, offering rewards, and considering saving the interlocutor face.	"I tried to use the expressions that would make the addressee feel comfortable".
Connection to personal life	Learners associate personal life experiences with the current situations with which they are faced.	"This was the situation we have encountered commonly in life. So I didn't spend much time on thinking about what to say and how to say it when making the request".

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Categories	Definition	Example
Cross-cultural comparison	Learners compare Korean culture with American culture and apply similarities or differences between them to their request realizations.	"In Korea, such a request would be thought to impose burden on addressee. But I felt that it would not be so burdensome in America as it would in Korea, which I think is kind of cultural knowledge I have learned during the stay here (US)".
Monitoring for language forms	Learners report difficulty in retrieving vocabulary, selecting language forms to express certain meanings, and determining the grammaticality of utterances they made.	"I was confused by 'turn down' and 'turn off', debated between them for a while, and ended up with 'turn down'".

1) Assessment of situation

It has been well known that the actual realization of requests depends on a variety of variables such as social variable (social power), personal variable (age and gender), and degree of imposition created by an act being requested (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). As stated earlier in the section on methodology, a discourse completion test used for eliciting requests in the study included twelve situations which were developed on the basis of a combination of two contextual factors (i.e., familiarity and social power). In their retrospective verbalizations, the Korean learners reported that they paid considerable attention to those factors, degree of familiarity between interlocutors and degree of social power between interlocutors, in making requests. As two subjects stated, "Above all, I considered to what extent I have known him (addressee), and this was the most important factor to determine the level of politeness and the degree of difficulty in making a request to him" (Subject #16). "I made my request based mainly on what kinds of jobs the addressee has and how much I know about the addressee" (Subject #24).

Other subjects pointed out the critical role of the contextual factors in the expression of politeness. Subject #1 said that "in this situation (Situation 4, Noise), since I, a library monitor, has a power to tell students talking loudly in a non-discussion area not to do so, I didn't think I needed to say much to them and entered into making a request directly without considering politeness. By the way, in a sense, it is natural for addressees (students) to stop talking because they have kind of obligation to do so in the library. So I don't think of politeness here". Also Subjects #5 and #22 made similar statements: "I was the owner of a bookstore. So I made a request in a commanding tone with no politeness in mind" (Situation 7, Subject #5). "I coped with this situation in an easy way, and any level of politeness was not needed because the request was made by a higher status person to a lower status person" (Situation 4, Subject #22).

In addition, some of the learners provided an explanation for the use of specific

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linguistic forms to express politeness in their requests. Subject #18 thought that politeness should be fully expressed because the addressee was a professor and because he was the person who put imposition on the shoulders of the professor. So the subject reported using 'Could/Would you ..?' rather than 'Can/Will you ..?' Similarly, Subjects #1 and Subject #30 decided to choose specific language forms on the basis of their judgments of familiarity and power relationships between them and addressee: "Since I didn't know the professor, I had to use the high degree of politeness. That's why I gave him a freedom to choose by employing 'if clause' (Situation 6, Subject #1). "The addressee was a close friend of mine, and I considered direct, less-polite expressions to be appropriate for the situation. So I selected the form 'I need help' instead of 'Could you ..?' (Situation 8, Subject #30). Such politeness behaviors of the learners gave support to Kitao's (1987) and Brown & Levinson's (1987) claim that variables such as the relative power of interlocutors and familiarity between them play important roles in the use of politeness in requests. The following are examples of the learners' retrospective comments showing the application of their assessments of the contextual factors to request realizations:

"Since learning English, I have realized that different English request forms are used according to whether addressees know about each other, who has more socially acknowledged job, and whether addressee is male or female, and so on. I kind of make it a rule to use the form 'Will you ..?' to friends, and 'Can you ..?' to a lower status person whom I know. Also I employ the form 'Would/Could you ..?' to a higher status person to properly perform requests". (Subject #1)

"When I knew the addressee, or when I had more power than him/her, I tended to make requests directly without hesitation. But if the addressee was a professor, who had more power than I, I planned what I should say in advance in my requests". (Subject #2)

"The addressee was a new professor whom I had never met. I thought that, before making a request, I should apologize for not having paid a visit to him before and use the high degree of politeness". (Subject #13)

"Since I didn't know the addressee, I felt somewhat embarrassed making a request. So I used lengthy openings by giving greetings and introducing myself". (Subject #26)

2) Monitoring for appropriate sociolinguistic expressions

In this category, the Korean learners were concerned mainly about appropriate use of language in request realizations. First, many of the learners stated difficulty in searching and choosing language expressions appropriate for a given situation. Subject #15 said that "Though I made a request to a classmate, I wanted to use gentle expressions (i.e., talk in gentle words) which I had difficulty finding". Another Subject #11 told that "my addressee was a professor whom I had known. I thought that I still needed polite expressions. But it was hard to find them because I haven't become

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accustomed to using them in English".

Likewise, other subjects pointed out difficulty in producing utterances and selecting expressions appropriate for a particular context. As Subject #19 put it, "I had to speak to a close friend, and once I started to make a request in English, I got stuck. When I was done, it seemed that I used unnatural, inappropriate expressions as compared to when I perform requests in Korean". Here are examples from other learners:

"I planned what I would say in Korean and translated it into English. But I had difficulty searching vocabulary and structures that were frequently used by native speakers in this situation, and determining the level of politeness appropriate for the context". (Subject #25)

"I thought that borrowing a notebook would give the classmate considerable degree of burden. So I wanted to reduce it but couldn't think of any expression". (Subject #2)

"I couldn't remember polite expressions that I really wanted to use". (Subject #17)

Second, some Korean learners questioned the appropriateness of language forms or expressions they employed. For instance, Subject #17 expressed concern about the form she used, saying that "my request might sound rude, and I had no idea of whether or not it would be ok to the native speakers of English". Another Subject #11 reported that since there was no familiarity between her and addressee, she tried to employ gentle expressions which would make the addressee feel comfortable. But she was not sure about the appropriateness of those expressions. Similarly, Subject #26 expressed uncertainty about the expression used, remarking that "I employed the expression 'Could you be quiet?' in order to sound polite. However, I wasn't confident that this expression was polite enough not to hurt the addressee feelings".

Third, there were also learners who showed hesitation in choosing appropriate expressions. Subject #22 stated that "though I (bookstore owner) had more social power than the addressee (clerk), I debated whether I should speak in a commanding tone, or talk in gentle words with politeness in mind". Subject's (#6) comment also reflected the self-debate of how to determine between two ways of speaking, i.e., speaking in a roundabout way and speaking in a short, businesslike way. Similarly, Subject #30 debated between the expression 'Can I study with you?' and 'Could you teach me?' and decided to use the latter since it appeared to be more polite and more likely than the former to obtain the addressee compliance with the request.

Finally, the Korean learners expressed anxiety over the appropriateness of their requests. Subject #12 said that "I worried about how to start conversations (i.e., what expressions I should use to open a conversation). Moreover, I felt uneasy because inappropriate use of language might result in misunderstandings from the native English-speaking addressee". Another Subject #6 added that "I made the request, hoping that it would make native speakers of English feel unimposing and also sound friendly

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to them".

3) Use of requestive skills

In this category the Korean learners reported the requestive techniques they employed in order to increase the likelihood of getting the interlocutor compliance with their requests, or reduce the imposition created by the requests. There were four types of requestive techniques identified: providing the reasons for making requests, arousing the interlocutor sympathy, offering rewards, and considering the interlocutor feelings.

First, many of the learners indicated that they gave the reasons for their requests to induce compliance from the interlocutor. Subject #25 stated that "Though my addressee was a close friend, I couldn't make the request for using a computer straightforwardly. I thought I needed to provide the reasonable reason why I wanted to use it". Other Subjects (#1, #16, #21, and #28) said that they tried to make the addressee understand the reasons for their requests, or persuade him/her to comply with the requests with a detailed explanation. The learners' preference for offering the reasons as a major request technique can be explained by House & Kasper (1987), who claimed that justifying a request with reasons greatly increases the possibility of an interlocutor compliance while also mitigating the threat to his/her face.

Second, some of the learners aroused the interlocutor sympathy, and others offered rewards in an effort to get his/her compliance with requests. These request techniques were used mostly in situation 7 (Bookstore) and 11 (Math exam). In the Math exam situation, Subjects #12, #13 and #16 indicated that they praised the addressee math ability, aroused sympathy, and used flattering utterances to get compliance. In the Bookstore situation, Subject #9 said that "Though I was the owner of the bookstore, I had no right to force the addressee (clerk) to work an extra hour. I thought that some kinds of reward should be given". Likewise, other Subjects (#8, #10, and #22) referred to the need for rewards, or the use of expressions showing familiarity between them and addressee.

Third, the learners remarked that they focused on considering the interlocutor feelings and reducing the imposition as request techniques. Subject #13 stated that "In the Music situation, upon my request, the addressee would feel uneasy or bad because we didn't know each other. So I wanted to show my consideration for his feelings and eliminate burden created by my request by avoiding explicit mentioning of 'you' and using the expression "I am a person sensitive to the loud music" rather than "your loud music disturbed my studying". Other Subjects (#16, #27, and #21) chose to speak in an indirect way since a commanding tone was likely to make the interlocutor feel uncomfortable and increase the level of imposition. Also Subject #1 and Subject #22 paid attention to the interlocutor privacy, commenting that "I didn't want my request to interrupt addressee privacy and this is why I had to be polite by adding 'please' and using the form 'Could you mind ..?'" The following are further examples:

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"I tried to use the expressions that would make the addressee feel comfortable". (Subject #11)

"I made the request by focusing on not hurting a friend feeling". (Subject #1)

"I thought that the addressee emotion should not be hurt, and polite expressions were employed". (Subject #25).

4) Connection to personal life

The Korean learners in this category linked their personal life experiences to the situations in the DCT that they were faced with. They reported that they based their requests on recollections of past situations which they had reacted to before. As Subject #6 commented, "I had experienced situations similar to this one, and remembered that at that time, due to my requests, I and my addressee had become estranged. So this time I tried to make the request in courteous words and with the highest degree of politeness".

Similarly, Subject #21 stated that "This was the situation that I had encountered before. This experience had led me to realize that offering the cogent explanation for request seemed to give the addressee familiar looking of me. Therefore, I looked for understandable and reasonable excuses for my request". Another Subject #10 associated a situation with her test experiences, commenting that "the Music situation (Situation 5) in the questionnaire (DCT) was an affair of common occurrence in everyday life, and I have also seen it in Toefl (Test of English as a Foreign Language). Without hesitation, I wrote down 'I'm sorry, would/could you ..?', the expression that I had memorized as a kind of mathematical formula". Here are examples of other Subjects:

"There were many situations in the questionnaire that I had reacted to before. I made my requests on the basis of these experiences". (Subject #6)

"This was the situation we have encountered commonly in life. So I didn't spend much time on thinking about what to say and how to say it when making the request". (Subject #9)

"I remembered having experienced a situation in which I had asked a professor to speak up in a large classroom. I thought that in this case, a student (a requester) had the fair reason for making such a request". (Subject #14)

5) Cross-cultural comparison

In this category the learners compared Korean culture with American culture and applied the similarities or differences between the two to their request realizations. Many of the learners referred to their consideration of the cultural differences between two countries in making requests, as one learner put it: "In a Korean society requests to friends are usually made straightforwardly. However, I think that an American society values individualism, and people don't like to impede others' freedom of act or privacy even between friends. So thinking of this cultural difference, I provided a detailed, lengthy explanation before making my request" (Subject #6). It was stated

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earlier that the Korean learners had come to the target community (i.e., US) to improve their English language skills and learn American culture in a naturalistic setting. Two learners (Subject #4 and Subject #7) indicated that they applied cross-cultural knowledge learned during their stay in the US to their request realizations:

"In Korea, such a request would be thought to impose burden on addressee. But I felt that it would not be so burdensome in America as it would in Korea, which I think is kind of cultural knowledge I have learned during the stay here (US)". (Subject #4)

"In the Bookstore situation, I realized my request with indirect, polite expressions because I have never seen the owner of the bookstore use direct, crude language to his/her employee here in the US, as compared to Korea where the owner is supposed to talk roughly to employees". (Subject #7)

Another Subject #6 reported difficulty in finding out polite expressions in English that could be used for a professor since he knew that there would be differences between the two cultures in expressing politeness, and thus he didn't want to employ Korean expressions in the English request in fear of negative transfer. Likewise, Subject #30 added that "I wasn't confident that the expressions which I tended to use in introducing myself in Korea could be made acceptable to this (American) cultural society".

6) Monitoring for language forms

The learners in this category showed linguistic concerns in their request realizations. They reported difficulty in retrieving vocabulary, selecting language forms to express certain meanings, and determining the grammaticality of utterances they made. Many of the learners expressed concerns about grammatical aspects of their request realizations, as they commented:

"I think that Korean students including me tend to pay too much attention to grammar even when engaging in a conversation with native speakers of English. For instance, in the Police officer situation (Situation 10), I debated whether I should use 'ing' form or 'to infinitive' form after a verb 'consider' and chose to use the former because it occurred to me that there is a grammatical rule that some verbs like 'consider' should take 'ing' form while others use 'to infinitive' form". (Subject #10)

"Whenever I make sentences, I think about grammar. But I don't think I have sufficient grammatical knowledge. I am not sure about whether sentences I made during the requests were grammatically correct". (Subject #19)

"I always have had difficulty using articles correctly. Since I translated Korean words in mind into English directly, I didn't have time to check whether they were put together with articles correctly". (Subject #20)

Other learners indicated that they had trouble conveying such meanings in English as 'use a microphone', 'speak up', 'forgive me this time', 'went to see a

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doctor', or 'want to borrow a book from you'. Still others told that they were not able to retrieve certain vocabulary like 'yield', 'midnight', 'special bonus', or 'speeding'. Also some learners debated between two forms, as they said:

"I was confused by 'turn down' and 'turn off', debated between them for a while, and ended up with 'turn down'. (Subject #7)

"I didn't know which one I had to use between 'turn in' and 'hand in'. (Subject #10)

"I was unsure about whether I should use 'break' or 'down' and decided to choose the former because I haven't seen the word 'down' used as a verb in an English sentence". (Subject #30)

As shown above, the findings of the Korean learners' verbalizations described what the learners had been doing and thinking in making their requests. They indicated how and on what basis the learners had used request strategies and selected level of politeness in certain situations. The six categories presented above clearly shows that the learners were engaged in a variety of mental activities and underwent cognitively complex decision-making processes occurring during request realizations. That is, they assessed contextual factors, monitored for appropriate sociolinguistic expressions, associated personal life experiences with the situations which they had been faced with, compared L1 culture with the target culture to apply similarities or differences between them to request realizations, and employed various requestive techniques to increase the possibility of the interlocutor compliance. Also they paid attention to grammatical aspects of their request realizations and monitored for language forms selected to express certain meanings.

It should be noted that as mentioned earlier, since the order in which each of the six categories is presented above does not represent the preceding occurrence of one category over the others, the learners did not pass through each one of the six categories in a sequential or linear fashion. Rather, individual learners reported undergoing various combinations of categories in various orders in a particular situation. Since in a sense, for language learners, making requests in a variety of face-threatening situations such as those in the DCT of this study can be seen as a problem-solving task, one may reasonably assume that the above six categories are viewed as the learners' problem-solving strategies employed in a sociolinguistic context.

The six categories give support to the findings of Cohen & Olshtain (1993) and the claims made by Blum-Kulka (1991). Also the importance of the six categories lies in providing empirical evidence that performing a request in a second language is not a simple task but involves cognitively complex, various mental processes. It requires the learners to not only encode their intended meaning of requests linguistically and grammatically correctly, but employ other knowledge and skills such as sociocultural knowledge, world knowledge, and requestive skills. This finding confirms Blum-Kulka's (1991) general model of the request schema in which a requester activates various types

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of information (e.g., linguistic, pragmatic, social and cultural information) in producing and comprehending the speech act of requests.

4. Conclusion

The focus in this paper has been on determining the ESL Korean learners' decision-making processes occurring in the performance of the speech act of requests. The results of the study suggest that the Korean learners' interlanguage system was engaged in cognitively various, complex processes when they realized requests. That is, they activated their own linguistic and sociocultural knowledge by attending to language forms and grammar, and considering the relationship between addressees in terms of familiarity and social power, politeness and degree of imposition created by request in their request realizations. In addition, it is shown that the use of immediate retrospection as a data collection method resulted in rich information about what the learners had been doing and thinking during their speech act performance. This implies that immediate retrospective verbalizations can be an useful research tool for interlanguage pragmatics studies and contribute to a better understanding of the speech act behaviors of language learners.

Concerning the limitations of the study, first, as stated earlier, it is an issue of controversy among researchers how well the DCT elicits responses that reflect actual speech act behaviors. So in order to better understand the ESL Korean learners' interlanguage requests and validate the findings of this study, it would be desirable to conduct further research in which immediate retrospective verbal data elicited from the DCT in this study would be compared with those after other methods such as an open role-play that allows subjects to interact in an open-ended context and organize the interaction in their own way.

Second, the ESL Korean learners' length of stay in the US was not controlled. They ranged in length of stay in the US from 2 to 10 months, and an average length of residence was 4.3 months. Since there have been few studies which systematically examine the relationship between length of stay in the target community and L2 pragmatic competence, it is not clear to what extent and in what ways the Korean learners' varied length of stay had an effect on their speech act performance. Nevertheless, existing evidence from interlanguage pragmatics research (e.g., Blum Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, 1986) shows that after more than five years of stay in the target community, L2 learners began to approximate the native level of language use. In light of this evidence, since the average length of stay by the Korean learners was 4.3 months, the uncontrolled factor, length of stay, did not seem to play a significant role in affecting the overall findings of the study.

The study has implications for the teaching of a speech act in L2 classrooms. As the results of the study shows, the learners had difficulty in retrieving vocabulary, selecting language forms to express certain meanings, and determining grammaticality of utterances they made. Such difficulties indicate that though the learners were in high

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proficiency levels (i.e., upper-intermediate and advanced), they have not yet attained pragmalinguistic ability to map an illocutionary force (i.e., intended meaning) of an act onto linguistic forms in a way that is normally accepted by target language speakers. Also the learners were not sure about the appropriateness of certain forms, showed anxiety over the appropriateness of expressions, and reported difficulty determining the level of politeness appropriate for a particular interlocutor and using polite expressions in a given situation, which implies that they did not have sufficient sociocultural knowledge. Since a performance of a speech act depends on a combination of pragmalinguistic and sociocultural knowledge (Cohen, 1996a; Thomas, 1983), it is of primary importance for L2 learners to focus on learning to use them together in communicative context and attain a balanced development between the two. By doing so, they can become both grammatically and pragmatically competent language users.

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Appendix A

Role relationships between a speaker and a hearer in terms of familiarity and social power in twelve situations

Situations	Familiarity (F)	Social Power (SP)	
1. Computer Lab	- F	+ SP: Speaker > Hearer	Speaker Dominance
2. Notebook	- F	0 SP: Speaker = Hearer	Status Equals
3. Paper	- F	- SP: Speaker < Hearer	Hearer Dominance
4. Noise	+ F	+ SP: Speaker > Hearer	Speaker Dominance
5. Music	+ F	0 SP: Speaker = Hearer	Status Equals
6. Article	+ F	- SP: Speaker < Hearer	Hearer Dominance
7. Bookstore	- F	+ SP: Speaker > Hearer	Speaker Dominance
8. Computer	- F	0 SP: Speaker = Hearer	Status Equals
9. Book	- F	- SP: Speaker < Hearer	Hearer Dominance
10. Police officer	+ F	+ SP: Speaker > Hearer	Speaker Dominance
11. Math exam	+ F	0 SP: Speaker = Hearer	Status Equals
12. Voice	+ F	- SP: Speaker < Hearer	Hearer Dominance

Appendix B

Questionnaire (DCT)

Instruction:

Please read the description of each situation carefully and write down what you would say in a given situation. Because this is not a test or a measure of your language skills, there is absolutely no correct or wrong answer to each situation. Please write down everything that you would say in the situation.

Situation 1)

As a part-time job, you are working as a computer assistant in a computer lab. It is the end of the semester, and there are many students waiting for their turn to use computers. While consulting one student problems, you see your classmate playing games excitedly. Academic use always precedes non-academic use in a computer lab. You approach him/her. What would you say?

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Situation 2)

You are taking a course. Last week you missed a few classes since you had a bad cold. A mid-term exam is scheduled to be held next week. You know that one of the classmates attends classes regularly and takes good notes. You want to borrow his/her notebook. You approach him/her. What would you say?

Situation 3)

Tomorrow is the due date of a final term paper for one of the courses you take this semester. However, you are not able to turn it in on time. You want to talk to the professor, whom you have known for a couple of years, and ask him/her to give you an extension on the paper. You go to his/her office and knock on the door. What would you say?

Situation 4)

As a part-time job, you are working as a library monitor. While checking on each floor in the library, you see a group of students that you don't know talking loudly in a non-discussion area. It seems clear that this loud noise disturbs other students' studying. You want those students to be quiet or move to a discussion area. You approach them. What would you say?

Situation 5)

You live in a dormitory. It about 12 o lock midnight. You are preparing for a mid-term examination tomorrow. However, you can't concentrate on studying because you have been hearing loud music coming from a nearby room for more than an hour. You don't know the student who lives there. You want him/her to turn down the music. You go to his/her room. What would you say?

Situation 6)

You need to read an important article to write a final term paper. Today you have just found that a library does not have the scholarly journal which includes this article. You have heard that a new professor in your department has this article. Since you haven't had a chance to meet and talk with this professor before, you do not know him/her. You want to ask him/her to lend the article to you. You go to his/her office, and knock on the door. What would you say?

Situation 7)

You are the owner of a book store. Your shop clerk has worked for a year, and you have gotten to know him/her quite well. It is the beginning of the semester, and you are very busy selling and refunding textbooks all day. Today you have a plan to extend business hours by an hour, and you want to ask the clerk to stay after store hours. What would you say?

Situation 8)

You are typing a term paper on a computer. Suddenly, the computer breaks, and you don't know how to fix it. The paper should be submitted by tomorrow because the professor will be out of town for a while. You know that your close friend has the same computer you use. You want to ask him/her to let you use his/her computer for typing the paper. What would you say?

Situation 9)

You are looking for a book that you need to read for writing a term paper. Today you have just found that this book was checked out and recalled by another student, which means that you will have to wait for at least a month. You have about a week to write the paper. You know that your professor has this book. Because you have taken a course from this professor, you know him/her. You want to ask the professor to lend the book to you. You go to his/her office, and knock on the door. What would you say?

Situation 10)

You are a police officer. You see a car driving 50 miles an hour on campus, where the speed limit is 30 miles an hour. You stop the car and approach the driver, who seems to be a student. What would you say?

Situation 11)

For the first time this semester, you are taking a mathematics course. You have had a hard time following lectures and understanding the textbook. A test is scheduled to be held next week. You notice that one student sitting next to you seems to have a good background knowledge of math, and is doing well. Since it is the beginning of the semester, you do not know him/her yet. You want to ask him/her to study together for the upcoming test. What would you say?

Situation 12)

You are taking a course from a professor whom you have never seen before. Today is the first day of class. The professor talks about important things, such as textbooks, assignments and exams. Since a classroom is rather large and the professor speaks with a soft voice, you can't hear him/her well. What would you say?

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